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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 006196

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/IPA AND NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2015

TAGS: PHUM PREL KIRF IR IS TU AE ISRAELI SOCIETY

SUBJECT: BAHAI LEADERS DESCRIBE RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN  
IRAN

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RICHARD JONES, FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In an October 19 meeting, the two highest-ranking officers of the Baha'i International Community, Secretary-General Albert Lincoln and Deputy Secretary-General Murray R. Smith, told the Ambassador that

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the Government of Iran still persecutes members of the Baha'i faith, whose 300,000 members in Iran comprise the largest non-Muslim minority in the country. Lincoln and Smith also said they expect the Iranian Ambassador to UNESCO to work "behind the scenes" to thwart efforts by the Government of Israel (GOI) to secure World Heritage Site status for a series of Baha'i holy places in Israel. END SUMMARY.

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Iran Persecutes its Largest Non-Muslim Minority  
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2. (C) The Government of Iran, Lincoln and Smith explained, has persecuted the Baha'i since the time of the revolution, during which revolutionaries killed 200 members of the Baha'i faith. Lincoln described a policy of continual harassment in which the Government of Iran:

- razes Baha'i holy sites;
- prevents Baha'i students from attaining education beyond the second-to-last year of High School;
- inhibits freedom of movement by generally refusing to issue passports;
- raids Baha'i universities;
- fails to prosecute individuals who perpetrate crimes against Baha'i members;
- and instructs judges to acquit Baha'i defendants who agree to deny their religious convictions.

3. (C) Lincoln explained that adherents of the Baha'i faith in Iran are ethnic Iranians and do not wish to leave the country. He said that as a result of the state-sponsored discrimination, however, many Baha'i members have sought refugee status in neighboring Pakistan. Baha'i leaders, Lincoln said, have urged members to stay in Iran, the birthplace of their faith's founder, Baha'u'llah.

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Iran May Seek to Undermine Baha'i in UNESCO Committee  
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4. (C) Lincoln said that the Government of Israel (GOI) has nominated a group of 11 different Baha'i locations between Haifa and Naharia to form, collectively, a new World Heritage Site. Although Iran is not a member of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee that will evaluate the GOI application, Lincoln asserted that the Iranian Ambassador to UNESCO is "influential," and will likely work "behind the scenes" to derail the application.

5. (C) Lincoln said he believes the GOI has supported the Baha'i nomination because the GOI seeks to bolster Israel's image as a diverse, pluralistic and tolerant democracy.

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JONES